Macbeth

**Plot Summary**

1. After a battle, Macbeth and Banquo hear the prophesy of the witches that says that Macbeth will be made thane of Cawdor and eventually king of Scotland and Banquo’s descendants will be kings.
2. King Duncan names Macbeth Thane of Cawdor, and Macbeth writes to his wife about the happenings
3. Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan.
4. They get Duncan’s guards drunk, and while Duncan is asleep, Macbeth stabs him, despite his doubts and a vision of a bloody dagger.
5. The next morning the crime is revealed and Macbeth kills the guards “out of rage”
6. Duncan’s sons Donalbain and Malcolm flee to Ireland and England
7. Macbeth then decides to kill Banquo and his son but Fleance gets away.
8. Banquo’s ghost visits Macbeth and he seems crazy to influential people
9. The witches tell Macbeth he should be afraid of Macduff, but he is safe against any mortal and will be safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Castle
10. After Macduff flees to England Macbeth orders that Macduff’s castle be seized and, that Lady Macduff and her children be murdered.
11. Macduff learns of the murders, and joins Malcolm and his army to fight Scotland
12. Lady Macbeth is haunted by dreams and stains of blood on her hands
13. Lady Macbeth kills herself and Macbeth becomes pessimistic but fortifies against the English
14. Birnam woods shield the soldiers as they come to Scotland
15. On the battlefield, Macduff reveals he was not “of woman born” but was born by C-section. He kills Macbeth and Malcolm becomes the kind of Scotland.

**Character Summaries**

*Macbeth*- Macbeth is a valiant, brave fighter who has does not have very good will-power or conviction. He is easily persuaded by his wife to kill Duncan, and then changes from hesitant in his actions to unrelentingly cruel in his actions. Whenever a problem arises, he uses violence and death to fix it, rather than policies. He can’t deal with his murders however, and goes essentially crazy, including periods of intense guilt, pessimism and depression, and cruel planning sporadically.

*Lady Macbeth –* Lady Macbeth begins the story as a power-hungry woman, who is the main reason Macbeth goes through with his murder of Duncan. She must push Macbeth to do the murder and wishes at one point to be “unsexed” so she can do the murder herself. She plays on Macbeth’s insecurity – his manhood – to provoke him to commit the murder. She is purely evil. As the play progresses however, Lady Macbeth becomes more human as she experiences intense guilt over the murders, is plagued by bloody dreams and sleepwalking, and eventually kills herself because of her guilt.

*Banquo –* Banquo is a general whose children are fated to inherit the Scottish throne. Banquo saw the same prophesy as Macbeth, but it not driven by the prophesy to kill Banquo and Macbeth, as Macbeth would’ve done. Banquo’s ghost is the main reason Macbeth is haunted by his deeds, because Banquo was his personal friend whom be murdered for self-gain. Since Banquo did not choose this same path, Macbeth feels even guiltier about his actions.

*The Three Witches –* The three witches, and their prophecies, are the ultimate reasons for Macbeth’s demise. Through their interactions with each other and Hecate, it is observed that the witched enjoy playing with humans; minds, and use the power of their prophecies for their own entertainment. It is hard to tell whether their predictions were made up and happened to come true, or whether they were telling the truth the whole time. Either way, the witches’ predictions caused the first domino to fall in the play of Macbeth.

*King Duncan -* The honorable, virtuous Scottish king who was murdered by Macbeth

*Macduff –* A nobleman is opposed to Macbeth as a ruler, and the man who kills Macbeth

*Malcolm –* King Duncan’s son, who is next in line for the throne, who flees to England

*Lady Macduff –* She can be considered a foil to Lady Macbeth, as she is very womanly and motherly; she is killed because she is married to Macduff.

**Settings**

1. Scotland – Scotland is the place of Duncan’s castle, Macbeth’s castle, and the place where the witches meet. Most of the play’s action takes here, especially the gruesome murders that occur so frequently. After Duncan is murdered, Scotland is in a state of chaos and darkness, and the disruption is only restored after the right ruler is given the throne. All the scenes that take place in Scotland reflect this darkness, as all the scenes concern evil planning or evil happenings.
2. England - England is the place of hope for the play. There, an army is raised by Malcolm, the rightful leader of Scotland, and this army begins the actions needed to get Macbeth off the throne. Although this setting is only used in one scene, it contrasts with the chaotic setting of Scotland and provides a different tone than the rest of the play.

**Symbols**

1. Blood – Blood represents the guilt that the characters feel after committing the murders. After Macbeth kills Duncan, he laments that nothing will be able to wash the blood off his hands. Later, Lady Macbeth is also plagued by the spots of blood she can’t get out of her hands. The blood was the lasting impression left from the murders, is it represents the lasting guilt both characters deal with until their deaths.
2. Hallucinations – Many of the characters experience hallucinations, and some of these visions are imaginary while some might actually be there. For example, before Macbeth kills Duncan he sees a bloody dagger, and later he sees the ghost of Banquo. Similarly, Lady Macbeth imagines a blood stain on her hand that she can’t wash off. Presumably the bloody dagger was imagined, as well as the stain on Lady Macbeth, but it is unclear whether the ghost of Banquo was there, or just a figment of Macbeth’s guilt. The hallucinations are like the blood in that they represent the characters’ unrelenting guilt.

**Motifs**

1. Prophecies – Prophecies are seen frequently throughout the play, and have a huge affect on the play as a whole .The witches’ first prophecy for Macbeth pushes him to murder Duncan, and this murder dictates the rest of the play. The witches also prophesize that Banquo’s descendants will become kings and that Macbeth should fear MacDuff but is safe until Birnam woods come to Dunsinane Castle. All of these prophecies come true except for the one about Banquo. These serve as foreshadows for the reader, and also make the reader question whether the prophecies are self-fulfilling or actually unavoidable.
2. Darkness – Darkness casts a shadow on almost every aspect of the play, emphasizing the dark events that are frequently being planned and unfolded. The witches meet in darkness, Lady Macbeth prays for darkness to cloak her part in the murder of Duncan, and the night of his murder, Banquo and Fleance talk about the dark night. This reoccurring image of darkness/night develops the very dark tone of the violent play.

**Themes**

1. Lust for power brings ruin
2. Guilt from wrongdoing brings ruin
3. Lack of virtue is dangerous

Crime and Punishment

**Plot Summary**

1. Rodion Raskolnikov contemplates an unnamed crime, and goes to Alyona Ivanovna’s house to change a watch and plan the crime.
2. Raskolnikov stops at a tavern and meets the drunkard Marmeladov who has a wife Katrina and a daughter Sonya.
3. Raskolnikov finds out his sister is marrying Luzhin, hears someone say Ivanovna should be dead, and that she will be alone the next evening.
4. The next night, Raskolnikov goes to Ivanovna’s house with a fake item and kills her. While looking for money, the sister Lizaveta walks in and he kills her too.
5. The next day he is called to the police station about rent and faints when they talk about murders; when he gets home he buries all the goods.
6. Asleep for 4 days, he wakes up and finds out that his housekeeper, Nastasya, and Razumikhin have been taking care of him. Zossimov, a doctor, and Zamyotov, a young police detective, have also been visiting him.
7. Raskolnikov almost confesses to Zamyotov that he is the murderer, and visits the apartment of the pawnbroker. When Marmeladov dies, he gives Sonya twenty rubles
8. Raskolnikov is irritated with his family and tells Dunya not to marry Luzhin; Razumikhin falls in love with Dunya; Sonya invites Raskolnikov to her dad’s funeral
9. Raskolnikov and Porfiry talk about the murders and at home Raskolnikov finds out a man has been looking for him. When he finds the man, the man calls him a murderer.
10. At a dinner, Raskolnikov and Luzhin get in a fight and Dunya breaks up the marriage. Afterwards, Raskolnikov says he never wants to see his family again, and Razumikhin realizes Raskolnikov committed the murders.
11. Raskolnikov visits Sonya and finds out she was a friend of Lizaveta. He makes her read the story of Lazarus while Svidrigailov eavesdrops.
12. Raskolnikov visits Porfiry again and accuses him of playing mind games with him, when a man named Nikolai rushes in and confesses that he committed the murders.
13. Luzhin comes to the funeral and accuses Sonya of stealing money from him. The bill is discovered her pocket, but Lebezyatnikov enters and says that he saw Luzhin slip the bill into Sonya's pocket.
14. Raskolnikov confesses the murders to Dunya, Mrs. Marmeladov dies, and Svidrigailov offers to pay for everything and tells Raskolnikov he knows he’s the murderer.
15. Porfiry tells Raskolnikov he suspects him and urges him to confess. At the same time Svidrigailov attempts to rape Dunya, pays her, and kills himself.
16. Raskolnikov confesses, gets a sentence of 8 years of hard labor in Siberia. Sonya visits him often, his mother has died, and Dunya and Razumikhin were married.

**Character Summaries**

*Raskolnikov*- Raskolnikov a smart and handsome, yet poor graduate living in a tiny room. He views himself to be above the rest of society, and does not understand how his intelligence does not help him have a better life. He thinks he should murder Ivanovna for the good of other people – because he is better than everyone else, he sees himself as allowed to do this. However, after he commits the crime, he lapses into a state of extreme guilt and self-loathing. He realizes because he can’t handle the crime, he is not really as elite as he thought. He still thinks the murder was justified and struggles to confess. Once he finds Sonya, he is able to. In jail he still believes he is better than the other criminals, but gradual accepts his place in the world.

*Sonya –* Sonya is a prostitute in order to support her family. Although she has an extremely difficult life, she remains strong and faithful, and relies on her religion to guide her. She is the reason Raskolnikov finds the courage to confess.

*Dunya –* Dunya is Raskolnikov’s brother. She is very similar to him, except she does not feel the same superiority he does. She is beautiful and smart, and receives the affection of Svidrigailov, Luzhin, and Razumikhin.

*Svidrigailov –* Svidrigailov is Dunya’s former employer, who serves as a villain in the book, more so than the murderer Raskolnikov. Although he puts on a nice front for Dunya and those who don’t know him, Svidrigailov is sneaky and conniving, yet is still able to accept reality. When Dunya denies him, he accepts the fact that she will never love him and lets her go. Although he commits suicide because of it, he at least shows that he can accept what he can’t change and doesn’t try to force things.

*Razumikhin –* Raskolnikov’s friend, who works hard to get out of poverty and offers Raskolnikov a job many times.

*Porfiry –* The man in charge of investigating the murders, who suspects Raskolnikov from the beginning and whose suspicion forces Raskolnikov into a confession.

*Nikolai –* Suspected of the murders, he eventually confesses and makes himself believe he committed the murders.

*Alyona Ivanovna –* The pawnbroker Raskolnikov kills because he resents her for cheating people out of their money and enslaving Lizaveta.

**Settings**

1. St. Petersburg – The city in which the story takes place. It is poverty-stricken and depressing, and contributes to Raskolnikov’s bad mood. The city and its poverty drive people to craziness; no one seems to be happy there.
2. Siberian prison – Little of the story takes place here, but the resolution of the work happens here. After continuing his elitist attitude for a little while in prison, Raskolnikov finally realizes that he is not better than everyone else and must serve his punishment like them. Raskolnikov finally learns from his wrongs and is redeemed.

**Symbols**

1. Blood – When Raskolnikov wakes up after the murders, the first thing he thinks of is the blood that stains his clothes. He can’t wash the blood off of them, and ends up just hiding them in a hole in his wall. This represents Raskolnikov’s guilt. He tries to hid it and not think about it, but like the blood, it can’t go away.
2. Lazarus – When Raskolnikov tells Dunya to read him the story of Lazarus, he wants to hear the story of ultimate resurrection. Lazarus had been in a tomb for days before Jesus brought him back to life. Raskolnikov feels dead like Lazarus, and wants to hear inspiration that he can “rise” and rejoin society.

**Motifs**

1. Poverty – Poverty is observed frequently throughout the work, in many of the main characters’ lives. The prevalence of this motif emphasizes the squalor that Raskolnikov and others live in, and gives somewhat of an explanation as to why Raskolnikov would be driven to commit the murders.
2. Death – Death first occurs with the murders of Ivanovna and Lizaveta. Then Marmeladov dies, followed by Mrs. Marmeladov and Svidrigailov. The frequent deaths help to further emphasis the horrible conditions of St. Petersburg, and the oppression that the people living there felt. Although Raskolnikov’s murders are justified, they become more understandable through the emphasis of his unbearable living conditions

**Themes**

1. Hubris leads to ruin
2. Guilt is the worst punishment
3. Redemption is always possible

Tale of Two Cities

**Plot Summary**

1. Jarvis Lorry brings Lucie Manette to the Defarges in Paris; Lucie recalls her father to life
2. Charles Darnay is accused of treason vs. England; Sydney Carton wins case by his looks.
3. In France Marquis Evrémonde runs down a plebian child with his carriage
4. Darnay meets his Uncle Marquis, and denounces his title as an Evrémonde. (Marquis is murdered by French revolutionaries that night)
5. Darnay asks Dr. Manette to marry Lucie, saying he will reveal his true identity
6. Carton also reveals his love for Lucie to Lucie
7. English spy Barsad visits the Defarges shop in France; she is knitting who will die
8. Darnay reveals his identity to Manette, he relapses then comes back
9. 1789 – The peasants in Paris storm the Bastille and the French Revolution begins and Gabelle, a man who maintains the Evrémonde estate, is imprisoned.
10. Three years later, Gabelle writes to Darnay, and Darnay immediately leaves for France.
11. Darnay is arrested and acquitted a year later by the help of Dr. Manette, then arrested again
12. Carton arrives in Paris with a plan to rescue Darnay and obtains the help of John Barsad, who is Solomon Pross, the long-lost brother of Miss Pross.
13. Defarge produces a letter explaining Manette’s imprisonment: Darnay's father and uncle enlisted Manette's medical assistance to tend to a woman, who one of the brothers had raped. The rapist also stabbed his brother. The jury punishes Darnay for the crimes of his family.
14. Carton overhears Defarge also planning to kill Lucie and her daughter so they leave
15. Carton switches places with Darnay by drugging him, and Defarge dies by her own gun and Miss Pross.

**Character Summaries**

*Charles Darnay –* Darnay is a very respectable man, seen firstly in his denouncement of his title as an Evrémonde, due to the atrocities his family has caused to the people of France. He later risks his life and goes back to France to help Gabelle, which ultimately results in his death sentence. He would typically be considered a “hero” of a novel, but Darnay does not exactly fit that description. His character is not very personal, and really doesn’t have an inner or outer struggle he must overcome.

*Sydney Carton –* Sydney Carton is a depressed and lazy alcoholic lawyer who fails at everything. He is aware his life is useless, but not completely so because of his love for Lucie. Lucie becomes his reason to live (and die) and this dedication to her displays a very big change in his character. As he goes to die for Darnay, Carton sees the countryside as he never has, and now feels like his life had a purpose.

*Doctor Manette –* Doctor Manette starts the novel as a delirious old man who has taken to making shoes in the Defarge’s wine shop as a result of his imprisonment. After his daughter Lucie brings him out of this state, Dr. Manette emerges as the distinguished man he once was, and is a stable character throughout the novel. He is influenced by everything around him, and uses his own influence to help get Darnay released after his first arrest.

*Madame Defarge –* Madame Defarge is a merciless revolutionary who spends her time knitting the names of the people who must die for the Revolutionary cause. She represents the chaos and relentlessness of the French Revolution. Her real cruelty is revealed when she turns on Lucie and her family, who aren’t really a threat to the revolution, but an act of vengeance for Madame Defarge’s past. She has been oppressed and lived a hard life, and takes this out on others. Her plan proves ultimately suicidal, as she dies by the bullet of her own gun.

*Lucie Manette –* The young girl who is able to bring her father to life and keep her family together. She is pure and kind, and very flat throughout the play.

*Monsuier Defarge –* Former servant of Dr. Manette who is a revolutionary but shows compassion to Manette

*Jarvis Lorry –* A kind-hearted business man for Tellson’s bank; becomes friends with the Manettes

*Miss Pross –* Raised Lucie; she is strong willed, and very loyal to Lucie; represents England.

**Settings**

1. France – In France it is truly “the worst of times.” There is excessive spending and the beginnings of violence. Poverty is seen everywhere, and the government has no regard for its people. The beginnings of the French Revolution are stirring, and the guillotine lurks right around the corner. It is here where Darnay is arrested twice for no apparent reason, and where people as innocent as Lucie are targeted as a threat to the revolution.
2. England – England at this time was very calm in relation to France. In the opening of the story, Dickens describes their problems, mainly about paranormal or religious fears and America. The people who live there are under less danger of being murdered because of their political beliefs, and while there the characters experience a much more relaxed atmosphere.

**Symbols**

1. Wine – Wine simply represents the blood of the French Revolution. In one scene in France, a wine cask has fallen onto the street and people scoop the wine to their mouths, hungry for blood. The Defarge’s also fittingly own a wine shop, where much of the planning for the revolution goes on. Just as the peasants of France are hungry for wine and a good life, they are hungry for blood to be spilled for their cause.
2. Knitting – Madame Defarge’s knitting does not only represent those who will die in the revolution; it also represents the benign cruelty of the revolution. Knitting is typically a harmless activity, but in this novel it has been transformed into a literal hit-list. Madame Defarge is often seen calmly knitting, and little does one know she is actually knitting the names of people who are to die. This represents the secrecy of the French Revolution and the quiet beginnings that turned into thousands of deaths at the quick guillotine.

**Motifs**

1. Opposites – The novel begins with “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” and this idea of opposites occurring simultaneously reoccurs often throughout the book. Many characters have foils to emphasize the opposites, such as Miss Pross and Madame Defarge. The two cities the novel takes place in have opposite problems, and different atmospheres. Sometimes, as is the case with Carton and Darnay, supposed opposites may in fact be more alike than the reader first noticed. This reoccurring motif of opposites emphasizes the time and political happenings that were going on during the story’s action.
2. Lack of freedom – Many of the characters experience lack of freedom, literally or figuratively. Dr. Manette and Darnay are both imprisoned in jail at one point, but both can also be described as imprisoned in their minds. Dr. Manette suffers from his memory of his jail time, and Darnay struggles to escape the effects that his title has on his life. Carton clearly struggles with himself, and tries to break free of his “good-for-nothing” reputation. The peasants of France try to break free out of the grip of poverty their government has imposed on them. The attempt to be truly free by the characters is very abundant in the novel.

**Themes**

1. Redemption is always possible
2. Avenging one’s own oppression by oppressing others is pointless
3. Love makes life meaningful

The Importance of Being Earnest

**Plot Summary**

1. Jack visits Algernon and says he wants to marry Gwendolen
2. Algernon asks about Cecily and Jack on the cigarette case – Jack confesses.
3. Gwendolen and Lady Bracknell arrive.
4. Jack proposes and she says yes and she loves the name Ernest
5. Bracknell interrogates Jack and refuses the marriage.
6. Algernon goes to Jack’s house pretending to be Ernest as Jack comes home mourning.
7. Algernon asks Cecily to marry him – she was “already” married to him.
8. Algernon goes to find Chasuble and Gwendolen arrives.
9. Cecily and Gwendolen fight over who is engaged to Ernest.
10. Jack and Algernon arrive and both women inform the other about the identities.
11. Both men confess and are forgiven after they say they are going to be christened.
12. Lady Bracknell arrives and interviews Cecily.
13. Jack says he will only let Cecily marry Algy if he can marry Gwendolen
14. Miss Prism is brought up and Bracknell confronts her about the baby
15. Jack finds out his true identity and his name actually is Ernest.

**Character Summaries**

*Jack Worthing*- As a baby, Jack was found in a handbag at a train station by Thomas Cardew. He has grown up with no parents, but has become a very wealthy and respectable guardian to Mr. Cardew’s granddaughter, Cecily. Jack pretends to have a sickly brother Ernest that lives in the city so he can travel to the city. Once there, he assumes the identity of Ernest. In the city he has fallen in love with his friend Algernon’s cousin, Gwendolen, who thinks he is his brother Ernest.

*Algernon Moncreiff –* Algernon isa witty, selfish, wealthy bachelor who is a close friend of Jack’s. He has also invented an invalid named Bunbury, whom he uses to get away from his everyday life. He is not ashamed of this practice, and is proud of being a “Bunburyist.” When Algernon finds out about Jack’s hidden identity, he goes to Jack’s country house pretending to be Ernest, purposely shaking things up. There, he falls in love with Cecily, who thinks that Algernon is Jack’s brother Ernest.

*Gwendolen Fairfax –* Gwendolen is an intellectual, pretentious woman who is very concerned with matters of moral righteousness. As the daughter of Lady Bracknell the cousin of Algernon, she falls in love with Algernon’s friend Jack, while he is posing as Ernest. Gwendolen is very much like her mother, concerned with honor and status, proven by the fact she only wished to marry someone names Ernest. Her comments are so ridiculous and ironic that she is likable.

*Cecily Cardew –* Cecily is Jack’s imaginative and girlish ward. She is obsessed with the name Ernest as well, and has married herself to Jack’s brother Ernest in her diary filled with her fantasies. Cecily is pure and unassuming, and always speaks her mind.

*Lady Bracknell-* Gwendolen’s mother and Algernon’s aunt, Lady Bracknell is snobby and overly concerned with the rules of society, serious in her outrageous proposals.

*Miss Prism-* Cecily’s teacher, who tries to be very proper; is in love with Dr. Chasuble.

*Dr. Chasuble-* Rector who will christen Jack and Algernon as “Ernest”; in love with Miss Prism

*Lane-* Algernon’s servant, who is sarcastic about Algernon’s ways.

**Settings**

1. Algernon’s city house – The play begins in Algernon’s city house, with Jack visiting assuming his identity of Ernest. The house is where Jack confesses to Algernon his two identities. It is also where he proposes to Gwendolen and where Lady Bracknell interviews him and refuses the marriage. The city house revolves around fun and excess.
2. Jack’s country house – Jack’s country house is where most of the climactic action takes place. It is where Jack and Algernon are revealed as their true identities, and it is also where the story of Jack’s life is revealed. The country house is more pure and calm than the city house, as reflected in the values of Cecily and Miss Prism, who live there.

**Symbols**

1. Food – Represents the gluttony and excess of Victorian society, principles that the society claims to condemn. Fighting among characters also frequently takes place in front of food, perhaps suggesting that this gluttony is a cause of many problems.
2. Lady Bracknell – represents the utmost snobbery of Victorian culture. Her comments, although outrageous and funny, overemphasize the views of the general population.

**Motifs**

1. Death – Death and conversations about death occur frequently throughout the play. Death is usually portrayed as something that one can choose, and to be constantly sick is a sign of incompetence. The play lightens the tone of death, in suggesting that is can be chosen and in many ways be beneficial to the dead and those around them.
2. Irony – Irony is seen in almost every aspect of the play, from the title, to the double meanings found frequently in what the characters say. This irony relates to the irony of the Victorian culture that Wilde was trying to criticize – the hypocrisy and double meanings throughout the play resemble the hypocrisy of the Victorian culture.

**Themes**

1. Lying is dangerous and ultimately ineffective
2. Humans care too much what others think of them
3. Fate can be controlled